

ON THE IDEA OF "NON-RETROGRESSION IN THIS LIFE"

In the practical field of Buddhism in general, the problem with regard to "Non-retrogression" may be mentioned as one of the topics of vital importance. In the Pure Land Buddhism as well, the idea of "Non-retrogression" is regarded as one of the themes of no less importance. As to the "Non-retrogression" in the latter case, it is commonly accepted in the Pure Land teachings that it is to be attained only after one is born in the Pure Land, that is, the "Non-retrogression in the yonder land". For all this interpretation, Shinran maintained that it is to be attained on the experiential level of faith, that is to say, the "Non-retrogression in this life", which is nowadays regarded as the feature of the teaching of Jōdo Shinshū. Then, on what ground is "Non-retrogression" attainable in this life? The inquiry into the ground of that possibility has been attempted in this thesis.

The first thing to which our attention is drawn as we try to inquire into the back-ground of "Non-retrogression" in the practical thoughts of Buddhism in general is the idea of "Cognition of the law of non-origination". It is generally understood with regard to problem of "Non-retrogression" that one is endowed with the virtue of "Non-retrogression" the instant one attains the "Cognition of the law of non-origination". The meaning of the phrase "Cognition of the law of non-origination" is made up of the ideas, "the law of non-origination" and "cognition." The former means the law of "All beings are voidness" (or the law of dependent origination), while the latter means our full recognition of the law of *śūnyatā*.

There is revealed the positivistic character of Buddhism and the feature of what it contains where the full cognition of the law of *śūnyatā* is referred to not merely as "attainment of the law of non-origination", but

as the “cognition of the law of non-origination”, employing the term ‘cognition’. The implication of this term constitutes a vital element in the concept of “non-retrogression”. The rudimental meanings of the term ‘cognition’ are as follows:

- a) Having the virtue of non-defilement
- b) Having *prajñā* (transcendental wisdom) as its original nature, also having the function of inference
- c) Having the power of detaching itself from the level of common mortals and attaining to Nirvāṇa

In view of the above implications, it is generally accepted that from this type of cognition is derived of necessity the virtue of “Non-retrogression.” Although the above view was mentioned in *Abhidharmakośa-śāstra*, the fundamental concept of ‘cognition’ is valid none the less in Mahāyāna Buddhism as well.

In the Pure Land teachings, it is especially in the story of religious experiences of Queen Vaidehī in *Kuan-wu-liang-chou-ching* (*Amitāyur-dhyāna-sūtra*) that “Cognition of the law of non-origination” is spoken of as holding the position of most importance. Here the conversion of Queen Vaidehī in which she was delivered by the influence of Amitābha Buddha is referred to as “attaining cognition”.

Taking note of this point would lead us to a most unforced understanding of the significance of the idea of “Non-retrogression in this life” taught in Shin-shū.

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